

A large, horizontal American flag serves as the background for the title. The stars are in the upper left corner, and the stripes extend across the page.

“Career Commands”

for Veterans



Instructions on Resumes, Interviewing, Networking, and More

Preview

Remember Drills!



AdvisorNet

Online Community
Assisting Veterans



AdvisorNet

Remember Drills!

Online Community
Assisting Veterans

Remember the drills from basic training – the constant and probably for many boring, meaningless repetition for marching, weapons, and formations. But answer this, particularly if you are a veteran who experienced this decades ago. How much of it do you still remember? How much could you repeat today, maybe a little or a lot slower, and with some lack of precision? I know that much of the marching, weapons, and formation skills I learned more than four decades ago could be accomplished – roughly – today. Why? The repetition – the drills – became hard-wired, muscle memory. Just like riding a bike, never to be completely forgotten.

While you may not find it pleasurable, you need to acknowledge the power of this learning for your job search. Put directly:

- Have you **written, rewritten, rewritten, and rewritten again** each of the key “accomplishments” on your resume?
- Have you **checked, double-checked, and triple-checked** your resume (letters and e-mails) to make sure the spelling and grammar are perfect?
- Have you practiced your responses to several different interview questions, **“over and over and over, ‘til you get it right?”**
- Have you **carefully thought about, and worked on, a vision**, for the career you want – not just a job?

First, an Important Reality

Even if your resume draws some additional consideration because you are a veteran, it is still very likely that your application is just one of many, maybe even one of a hundred or more applications. Today's job market is both highly competitive and constantly changing. And, as the economy and the job market improve, there will be even more competition for jobs as those currently employed seek out new opportunities.

Your application or resume is very likely to be quickly scanned by “tracking” software looking for key words or it's likely to be scanned by an individual trying to reduce a pile of resumes to a manageable stack. Research, and admitted practices of major organizations, reveal that 85-90% of applicants are eliminated this way – often in the milliseconds of a computer or a couple of minutes from a recruiter.

This extremely competitive environment for job seekers makes the following parts of your preparation even more important. You must distinguish yourself from even the “average” job seeker.

Accomplishments versus Skills and Experiences

The majority of resumes appear to focus on bullet point lists of skills and experiences. They often describe the typical duties or tasks – reading like a job description, in a “just the facts,” boring format.

...

Veterans often struggle translating military accomplishments to what they perceive to be civilian requirements. This is one of the multiple reasons why “accomplishments” are so important.

Technical Elements Are Critical

The technical elements of your resume, or LinkedIn Profile, are critical. Errors on your resume will almost guarantee its placement in the “C” pile – where there’s no chance of further consideration. Spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, poor spacing, or poor/small font selection can remove your resume from consideration in under a minute.

- One misspelled word can prompt its reader to dismiss your application.
- A simple “it’s versus its” mistake will irritate some hiring managers.
- A resume crammed into a single page with an 8pt. font and ½ margins is likely to be simply glanced at and rejected.

Too many job seekers go it alone when developing their resumes or online profiles. Others rely on the “good friend or relative” who claims expertise in resume writing. Without help, there’s just a reality that it is you’ll likely misspell a word or make a grammatical error. You cannot rely on the basic features of a word processing program to catch everything. Make sure someone reviews your resume and online profiles.

Practice, Practice, Practice

A very professional, well-trained interviewer recognizes that most candidates are not experienced interviewees. In fact, they recognize that many candidates have not been interviewed for many years or have had very few interviews. But, there is no guarantee that you’ll be interviewed by one of these professional, well-trained interviewers. Here’s another reality: You’ll be asked bad questions. It does not mean you have to give bad answers!

There are two steps to becoming effective as an interviewee. The first is preparation. One of the best techniques for preparation is one known as “C-A-R Mini Stories,” valuable for both preparing your resume and for interviews. I learned the “C-A-R Mini Story” technique from a true guru of job search knowledge. He instructed participants in his highly successful Job Search Workshop to prepare a deck of index cards, each card representing 4-5 accomplishments from each position and for school. The “C-A-R Mini Story” technique asks:

- **Challenge**
 - What needed to be done?
 - Where did you start?
- **Approach**
 - What did you do?
 - How did you proceed?
- **Results**
 - How well did you do it?
 - What did you accomplish?

The accomplishments on your resume are going to be 3-4 lines, about a minute or two as an answer in an interview. This is good for an initial answer but not enough when your interviewer asks for more information about that accomplishment from your resume. A well-trained interviewer may probe, may “peel the onion,” for additional details for 8-10 minutes.

The second key step is practice – and again, it is “practice, practice, practice.” Here is where the direct message from a veteran’s training, like marching drills and weapons practices, must be recalled. You want to hard wire keys parts of your accomplishment stories in your brain. That cannot be accomplished with a single run through. It cannot be accomplished with a second or a third. Moving away from the powerful military example for a moment, there’s a song, “Why,” from a lesser known Broadway musical, with extremely meaningful lines:

*“We sang “Yellow Bird” and “Let’s Go Fly a Kite”
Over and over and over
Till we got it right.”*

It Should Start with a Vision

Although it is the last of the factors presented here, your search for a successful career should start with a vision for your career. The reality of supporting yourself and a family may have a major impact on this but do not let that deter you from creating a career plan based on your vision. Your vision is a specific, detailed picture of your ideal future. It is based on a thoughtful effort to define that future.

Career expert Richard Nelson Bolles talks about discovering your “mission” in life. He defines three levels for a personal, family, and career “mission.” The concern here is your career – using the talents you have been given, the talents you’ve developed, in a way that makes you feel strong and offers value to your organization, your community, your world.

Futurist Joel Barker provides reliable advice on developing a powerful vision:

- Developed by Leaders
 - This is your vision, your responsibility. It is not given to you by others.
- Shared with Team
 - Who’s your team? Family? Friends? Colleagues? “Shared” does not mean giving them control of your vision. It does mean enlisting their input and support.
- Comprehensive and Detailed
 - It is not as simple as “I want to start my own business,” or “I want to be an engineer.”
 - Imagine a typical day in a job that represents your best work that uses your strengths
- Positive and Inspiring
 - Simply stated, your vision should appeal to your head (logical), your heart (passion), and your feet (action).

Conclusion

There’s more work required to successfully create the components and prepare yourself for a career search. In addition to the elements noted here, you might need to create a LinkedIn profile and mentally wrestle with a large amount of information from your military career. It’s a big mistake to think that this is easy and only requires a couple of hours work. Remember Drills!

About the Author

Jim Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR is a management consultant, U.S. Army Veteran, with a career long interest in hiring, retention, and career skills. Visit his career skills website at www.212-careers.com